

A
GOLDEN CHAIN
 O F
F O U R L I N K S,

To draw poor Souls to their desired Haven:

Q R, T H E

Last Four Things briefly discoursed of, viz.

D E A T H, which is most Certain:
J U D G M E N T, which is most Strict
H E L L, which is most Dismal: And,
H E A V E N, which is most Delightful.

To which are added,

Wholesome Instructions both to Young and Old, in
 order to prepare themselves for their latter end, and
 avoid all sinful Allurements, which usually obstruct
 that great and necessary Work of Salvation.

With some necessary Directions how to die well, in
 order to avoid Hell, and obtain Heaven.

Recommended as very proper to be read in Families.

By Mr. J. S T E V E N S, M. D.

G L A S G O W:

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M D C C L K X X V I .

TO THE
R E A D E R.

CONSIDERING that this ungrateful age abounds with so much infidelity, impiety, and unbelief, as to make some so obstinate as to affirm, That the spirit of man vanisheth with his breath, and that death is only the end of this life, and not the beginning of another; I thought it highly necessary as well as proper and convenient, in order to awaken the hardened and drowsy consciences of such, to give some lively (though brief) touches upon the last four things; viz. Death, which is most certain; Judgment, which is most strict; Hell, which is most dismal; Heaven, which is most delightful: All which, I shall particularly and briefly instance.





A GOLDEN CHAIN of FOUR LINKS, to bring poor Sinners to their desired haven.

PSALM lxxxix. 84. *What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death?*

I. Of D E A T H.

OUT of the dust was man formed, and unto the dust shall man return: *It is appointed for all men once to die*, Heb. ix. 27. Death to the wicked is the end of all comfort, and the beginning of all misery; but death to the godly, is a happy discharge and freedom from sin and sorrow, and the only inlet to peace and happiness: the saints' enjoyments shall be incomparable, when the sinner's torments shall be intolerable. When a sinner dies, he carries his *bad* with him, and leaves his *good* behind him; but when a believer dies, he leaves all his *bad* behind him, and carries his *good* with him: the sinner goes from good to evil; the believer from evil to good. When a saint leaves the world, his flesh turns to dust, and his spirit returns to rest: When a sinner leaves the world, his body goes to worms to be consumed, and his soul to flames to be tormented.

When you come into the world, you do but live to die again; when you go out of the world, you do but die to live again. He that lives well, cannot die ill: He that lives without fear, shall certainly die without hope. He that hath no grace in his life, can have no true peace in his death. *This king of terrors, Death, bevelleth the highest mountains with the lowest vallies;* the robes of princes and the rags of beggars are both laid up alike in the wardrobe of the grave, which is a bed to rest in, but not a shop to trade in: therefore go to your beds, as you were going to your graves, and

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and so close your eyes in one world, as you would open them in another ; and remember that God can as easily turn you into dust, as he took you hence : To-day is your living day, to-morrow may be your dying one. — In short, the meditation of death is the only motive in order for a preparation thereunto.

Therefore, Christian soul, whosoever thou art, consider the shortness of thy life, and how uncertain death is : he may come this hour before the next. Thou art not sure when thou goest to bed at night to take thy rest, (though ever so well,) whether thou shalt ever awake again ; and if so be thou awake in the morning, whether thou shalt live till night : for death is the great messenger of mortality : and his coming is certain, but the time uncertain. There is no resisting his mighty power, when he comes. He sweeps all before him, both rich and poor, old and young, it is all one to him ; for when their glass is run, they must stay no longer here, but change this life for a better or worse, according as thou hast spent thy time here, whether in doing good or evil. Therefore, dear soul, put not off thy repentance until another day, for thou art not sure to see an end of this. Provide therefore, that thy bed may rather find thee fitted for God, than fit thee, and so order thy estate and thy soul, in thy health, that when death comes thou mayest have nothing to do but die. Let not thy thoughts be how thou shalt live here, but how thou shalt live hereafter : mind not the vain pleasures of this world, which are but momentary ; but rather pray to God for his grace, without which you can do nothing, that you may endure all hardships and crosses here with patience and comfort, and that you may do all the good that in you lies to the advancement of his glory, and your eternal welfare.

II. *OF JUDGMENT.*

Meditate upon Judgment, which is most strict : We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ. They who have been graceless in their day,

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will be speechless in this day; they who would not come before his mercy-seat, shall be forced to come before his judgment-seat; those that would not believe his promises, shall tremble at his threatenings. And indeed it must be very amazing to see the earth flaming, the heavens melting, the stars falling, the graves opening, the judgment hastening, the sun and moon declining, and Christ and his angels coming. He that comes to raise the dead, comes also to judge the dead.

Oh! this great day, to great sinners, will be a terrible and ghastly day, when they shall behold Christ coming in the clouds, having the person of a man, but the power of God; being crowned with dignity, guarded with angels, enraged with anger, and enabled with power, to bring forth both high and low, rich and poor to his bar; where he will judge them, not by the whiteness of their countenance, but by the blackness of their consciences: and though he was guarded to the cross with a band of soldiers, yet here he is guarded by a glorious train of angels. You that make no account of his coming, what account will you make at his coming. Therefore, for the Lord's sake, meditate upon judgment, for this is the only means to make you judgment proof.—O Christian, seriously consider this, and repent of your sins before it be too late, and break those bands asunder that lead to utter destruction, for there is no repentance after death, for after death comes the judgment.

O ye drunkards, swearers, liars, whoremongers, covetous and oppressors of the poor; you that do despite to the Spirit of grace, and will not hearken to the many calls and invitations of Almighty God by his Spirit and ministry, take notice that this day of God's wrath will be a day of terrors to you, which will make your hearts sink within you, your countenance to change, your joints to be loosened; when the terrors of the Almighty at this time shall seize upon you: therefore saith the apostle, 1 Cor. v. 11. *Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.* This day will be a day of extreme sorrow and anguish to the wicked, Prov. i. 20.

When

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When your fear shall come as desolation, and your destruction as a whirlwind. Zeph. i. 15. That day is the day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolations. Therefore, whoever you are, let your daily practice be in piety, doing good to those that stand in need of your help, as far as your circumstances will let you, being charitable and compassionate, ever striving against the temptations of the devil, slighting the pleasures of this world, accounting them as they are, nothing but vexation of spirit, but be always minding those that are eternal; for if you expect to be as any of those souls that dwell in those mansions of bliss and happiness, you must fear God and keep his commandments, for that is the whole duty of man.

III. The Torments of HELL, and dismal state of the wicked.

THE third thing necessary, is to meditate upon that which is most dismal and terrible: Oh a dreadful place, where the devil is the jailor, hell the prison, damnation the punishment, eternity the time, brimstone the fire, and men and infernal spirits the fuel; to endure this will be intolerable, and to avoid it will be impossible.

Christians, this present day is the day of God's long suffering, but that will be man's eternally. Oh what hell there is in hell, the loss of God, the loss of Christ, the loss of saints, the loss of angels, the loss of all good, and the gain of all endless, easelless, and remediless torments: *The smoke of their torments ascendeth up for ever and ever*, Rev. xix. 3. Oh that ye would think of this endless and bottomless lake.

Consider, that if thou but once droppest into hell, thou wilt be as far from coming out at the end of a thousand years, as at thy first entrance: So if that all men that ever have or shall be created, were Briarius-like, hundred handed, and should at once take pens in their hundred hands, and do nothing else for ten hundred thousand millions of years, but sum up in figures

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gures as many hundred thousand millions as they could; yet could they never reduce to a total, or confine within number this trisyllable word (Eternal) or that word of four syllables (Everlasting.)

Now, let such as forget God, but seriously consider this. It will not be an imprisonment during the king's pleasure. It is not a captivity of seventy years, like that of the children of Israel in Babylon; for that had an end: Nor like a captivity of seventy millions of generations, for that also in time would be expired, but even for ever. The wicked shall live as long in hell, as there shall be a just God in heaven.

Here we measure time by days, months, years; but for eternity, there is no Arithmetician can number it; no Geometrician can measure it: For suppose the world were turned into a mountain of sand, and that a little Wren should come every thousand years, and carry away from that heap but one grain of the sand, what an infinite number of years would be spent and expired before the whole heap would be fetched away? but admit a man should stay in torments so long, and then have an end of his woe, it were some comfort to think an end would come: But, alas! when he has finished his task a thousand times over, he shall be as far from an end of his anguish, as he was the first hour he entered into it. Now, suppose thou shouldst ly but one night grievously afflicted with a raging fit of the stone, strangury, toothach, pangs of travail, or the like; though thou hadst to help and ease thee, a soft bed to ly on, friends about thee to comfort thee, physicians to cure thee, all cordial and comfortable things to assuage the pain; yet how tedious and painful wold that one night seem unto thee? how wouldest thou toss and tumble, and turn from one side to another? counting the clock, esteeming every minute a month, and thy present misery insupportable, what then will it be to ly in flames of fire? (to which our fire is but air in comparison) fire and brimstone kept in the highest flame by the unquenchable wrath of God, world without end, where thou shalt have nothing about thee but darkness.

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ness and horror, wailing and wringing of hands, desperate yellings and gnashing of teeth : Thy old companions in vanity and sin, to ban and curse thee ; the devil insulting over thee with cruelty and sorrow ; the never dying worm of conscience to feed upon thy soul and flesh for ever and ever. O everlasting eternity ! an everlasting life, and an everlasting death.

O then bethink thyself of these words (Eternal) and (Everlasting) and ponder upon them ; yea, do but indeed believe it, and it will be enough to break thine heart, and make it to relent and repent, and thereby prevent the wrath to come ; it will put thee to demur, what have I done ? what am I about ? whither will this course tend ? how will it end ? what will become of me if I go on in chambering and wantonness, surfeiting and drunkenness, strife and envying, swearing, profaneness, and the like ? O then break off thy sins without delay, and let there be an healing of thine errors.

The schools affirm, that the least torture in hell exceeds the greatest that can be devised ; for should we first burn off one hand, then another after that, each arm, and so all the parts of the body, it would be deemed intolerable, and no man would endure it for all the profits and pleasures this world can afford ; and yet it is nothing to the burning of the body and soul in hell, it were grievous but nothing to eternity : Should we suffer one pain, it were miserable enough ; but if ever we come there, our pains shall be for number and kinds infinitely various, as our pleasures have been here : every sense and member, each power and faculty both of soul and body shall have their several objects of wretchedness, and that without intermission or end, or ease, or patience to endure it, Luke xii. 5. xvi. 23. Mat. iii. 12. v. 22. xvii. 23. O that they would consider the evil nature of sin, and the dreadful consequences of it in the next world ? O that they would consider they hang by slender strings (a little breath that expires every minute) over the bottomless pit, and that within a little while nothing will remain of the pleasures of sin, but the never-dying worm, and the ever-living flames.

There

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There is a way to keep a man out of hell, but no way to get a man out of it: Though the wheat and the chaff grow together, they must not ly together; so in hell there shall not be a saint among those that are terrifid, nor in heaven a sinner among those that are glorified.

The sea of bitter damnation shall not be sweetened with the least drop of compassion. Oh Christians, will you pity a body that is going to the block, and will you not pity a soul that is going to the bottomless pit.

What a sad visitation is that, where the black horse of death goeth before, and the red horse of wrath followeth after: Oh, how intolerable must it needs be, where one death comes upon the neck of another.

A man's condition in this life may be honourable, and yet his state, as to another life may be damnable: It is better to go with poor Lazarus to heaven, than to go with rich Dives to hell: Therefore let us strive to go to heaven by contemplation, that we may avoid going to hell by condemnation.

Consider further, and add extremity to eternity, and then think of hell, as it truly is hell indeed; for if the ague of a year, or the cholick of a month, or the rack of a day, or the burning of an hour, or the minute's twitch of a tooth be so insufferable here, what is millions of thousands of years, nay eternity of unspeakable torments in hell; and instead of being abated, continually aggravated by infernal fiends, whose society alone would be hideously frightful and amazing.

Now, what heart would not bleed to see men run headlong into these torments that are thus endless and intolerable? Oh that it were allowed to the resolute and desperate ruffians of these our days, that swear and curse, drink, rob, kill, and blaspheme, to have but a sight of this hell, how would it charm their mouths, moderate their spirits, and astonish their hearts; nay, if they could have but the least glimpse thereof, they would rather choose to be pined to death ten thousand times over, than wilfully commit one sin that would send them thither.

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IV. *Of H E A V E N.*

THE fourth necessary thing is to meditate on Heaven, which is most joyful. Mat. xxv. 30. *Come ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.* Oh, who can reveal the glories of this heaven, or what tongue can express the everlasting pleasures that are there? There is no care, nor sorrow, nor toil, nor labour, no vexation to disturb your quiet: There is all peace, never ceasing peace: There is all the divine souls, as angels, saints, prophets, martyrs, seraphims, and cherubims; and all the celestial quire, breathe forth in their harmonious voices, eternal hallelujahs, and songs of praise to the all-glorious almighty and everlasting God, blessed for ever more. There every righteous soul that departs hence, goes and receives a white robe, and an everlasting crown of glory; and dwells in that land of peace, and drinks of the rivers of pleasures, and not for a time, but for eternity; an eternity, I say, that will never have an end. There they behold the beauty of the blessed God, seated on a throne of divine majesty, with his dearly beloved Son (our blessed Saviour) on his right-hand, and admire the gloriousness thereof: there they themselves outshine the sun in brightness; there they continually hear sounds of harmonious music; possessing continual joy and endless comfort. There is mirth without sadness, light without darkness, pleasure without pain, life without death, rest without labour, plenty without poverty, and gain without loss: Who would not work for this glory with the greatest diligence, and wait for it with the greatest patience. Oh what glories are there in glory; vessels of glory, a weight of glory, a kingdom of glory! Here Christ puts his grace upon his spouse, but there he puts his glory upon her: in this life believers have some good things, but there the best are reserved for thee. Heaven is not only a possession promised, but a possession purchased: When our contemplations are in heaven, then we enjoy a heaven upon earth. Do we delight in

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in good company : What pleasure then shall we enjoy in the company of saints and angels, in whom there is nothing but joy, comforts and delights ? Do we desire riches, honour, beauty, pleasure, long life, or what-ever else can be named to be delectable ? No place so glorious by creation, nor so beautiful with delectation, so rich in possession, so comfortable for habitation, nor so durable or lasting. There is no estate but inheritance, no inheritance but kingdoms, no house but palaces, no noise but music, no rods but sceptres, no garments but robes, no seats but thrones, no covering for heads but crowns, Rom. viii. 17. Tit. iii. 7. Heb. ix. 15. Mat. xxi. 34. 2 Tim. iv. 8. Gal. iv. 7. 1 Pet. iii. 9, 10. Mark x. 23, 24. Rev. vii. 3. There we shall see the blessed face of God, who is the glory of all sights, and the sight of all glory ; yea, ourselves shall outshine the sun in brightness, Mat. xiii. 3.

In short, our joy there will be full, and none shall be able to take it from us, or lessen it. Solomon in all his glory and royalty, compared to this, was but as a spark of light in a chimney, to the sun in the firmament. Absalom's beauty to this, is but deformity ; Samson's strength to this, is but infirmity ; Methusalem's age to theirs, is but minority ; yea, how little, how diminutive are the poor and temporary enjoyments of this life, in comparison of those we shall enjoy in the next, 1 Cor. ii. 9. Nay, paradise, or the garden of Eden, was but a wilderness compared with this : and if the gates be of pearl, and the streets of gold, what then are the inner rooms, the presence chamber of the great Monarch of heaven and earth ? What then may we think of the Maker and builder thereof, who there will be all in all unto us ; as meat to our taste, beauty to our eyes, perfumes to our smell, music to our ears ; what shall I say more, but as the Psalmist saith, *Glorious things are spoken of thee, thou city of our God,* Psal. lxxxvii. 3. Rev. iii. 2, 3. and xxi. 10, to the end ! That which makes heaven so full of joy is, it is above all fear ; and that which makes hell so full of horror is, that it is below all hope. The vessels of grace shall swim

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swim in the ocean of glory. Here all the earth is nothing for one man, but there one heaven is enough for all men. Therefore, Sirs, live so, that the word which hath brought salvation unto your souls, may bring your souls to salvation. We must first shine in grace, before we can shine in glory.

Be willing to want what God is not willing to give. Man is such a debtor to God, that he can never pay his due to God; we are so far from paying the utmost farthing, that at the most we have not a farthing to pay: There is no man but hath received more good than he deserved, and none more evil; and therefore should be contented, tho' he suffer much evil, 1 Tim. vi. 8. A Christian is to submit to the will of God's disposing, as well as to the will of God's commanding. A gracious heart should never be out of heart: if God be not willing to give thee riches, O then be willing to want riches. If God be not willing to give thee health, O then be thou willing to want it.

O Christian, submit thy will to God's will. That soul shall have his will of God, who desires nothing but God's will. Do you but take care of that which belongs to God, and God will take care of all that belongs to you.

Now, let us consider a little, what signifies these silly foolish pleasures here to those that are in heaven; pleasures which are but momentary to those that are eternal: What if we suffer a little sorrow here, for thirty or forty years, which is but a small while to enjoy an eternity of happiness hereafter, is it not better than to partake of the pleasures of this world, and to have our beastly delights, and to be damned in hell for ever after!

Oh, consider also how much of your precious time is wasted and spent, and how little of your great work is done. Hath not your rest stolen away half your time, and your lust the other? Your work is great, and your time is short; you have a God to honour, a Christ to believe in, a soul to save, a race to run, a crown to win, a hell to escape, and a heaven to make sure

sure of: you have many temptations to withstand, and many afflictions to bear, many mercies to improve, and many duties to perform; therefore, O Christians, redeem the time, because the days are evil, Ephes. v. 15. O that every step your souls take might be towards heaven, and that you would make sure of God to-day, because to-morrow you are not sure of yourselves: Therefore, for the Lord's sake improve your time, and for your soul's sake redeem your time. The lawyer will not lose his term, the waterman will not lose his tide, the tradesman will not lose his exchange-time, the husband-man will not lose his season, and will you lose your season? If you lose your season, you lose your precious soul. There is but one heaven, and if you miss of that you will certainly take up your lodging in hell.

I must sum up all, with these exhortations. Let me beseech you who are young men and young women, to remember your Creator in the days of your youth, that is, to serve God, to love him, to honour him, and to obey him in your youthful days, for the flower of life is of Christ's setting; therefore let it not be of the devil's plucking. Oh young people, if you be now sick of the will not, in old age you will die perhaps of the cannot; if God's to-day will be too soon for thy repentance, thy to-morrow may be too late for his acceptance: Let nothing be done in this world which cannot be answered in another, nor nothing undone which may be necessary in another. He that departs this life in faith shall he saved, but he that departs from the faith shall be damned. Therefore I say unto you all, both old and young, with St. Paul, 1 Cor. xv. 58. *Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the works of the Lord, for as much as you know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

Some holy Directions how to die well.

MY brethren, *What doth the Lord require of you, but to do justly, to love mercy, and walk humbly with God;* and to break off your sins, and to take no more pleasure or delight in them, but hate and abhor them for the future, and utterly cast them behind your backs, and to press forward to the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus our Lord: For the time is hastening and coming on, when it shall be said, *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still; and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still,* Rev. xxii. 11. The infinite, holy, and heart-searching God watcheth, seeth, and takes a strict account of all your actions, and they will find you out, and if not truly repented of, and pardoned, they will lie down with you in the grave, and follow you in another world, and meet you at God's awful bar, and be open to the view of the whole world; sin is a bad bed-fellow, and a worse grave-fellow.

Therefore, whatsoever is now your duty to do both to God and man, set about and do it with all your might, Eccl. ix. 10. Now, before the ~~advice~~ comes forth, and the fierce anger of the Lord come upon you.

1. Be very careful and diligent in those means that are appointed for your salvation. *Make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall,* 2 Pet. i. 10. It is our present work and business to make sure of eternal happiness and blessedness; for there is no landing at the shore of felicity, without sailing in the bark of fidelity: till you make sure of salvation, you will never be free from temptations. *Strive to enter in at the strait gate, &c.* Luke xiii. 24.

2. Therefore pray without ceasing, 1 Thes. v. 17. Pray continually, though ye be not always at prayer; our daily wants call for daily prayers: every morning put up your prayers to the most high God, maker of heaven

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heaven and earth ; let it be your first work and your last work. You that would be Christians indeed, and not in outward shew and profession only, lock up your hearts with prayer, and give God the key, and he will preserve you, and then you may sleep without any fear of danger. O you will never want a praying time, if you do not want a praying frame. O the strength and virtue of divine prayer, it will bring fire from heaven, yea, an angel from heaven, to fetch a Peter out of prison. They that pray heartily in faith, may be fully assured they shall speed happily.

3. Take all opportunities and embrace them, for the hearing of the good word of God ; for faith comes by hearing of the word preached.

4. Live in love and charity towards all men, your greatest enemies as well as your greatest friends. *My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth, 1 John iii. 18.* Let your love be real and true, and not selfish ; *Love thy neighbour as thyself, Gal. v. 14.* : And he that is wanting in this great work, doth not rightly and truly love himself. This love is called an old commandment, and a new commandment ; it is as old as the law of Moses, and as new as the glorious gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The natural and moral man may love his friend, but the true Christian indeed loves his enemies. A Christian should wish the best to them that wish the worst to him.

5. Be ye humble Christians, Mat. xi. 29. A believer is like a vessel at sea, the more it fills, the more it sinks ; none so humble on earth, as those that live highest in heaven : Where humility is the corner-stone, there piety is the top-stone ; the cloth of humility should always be worn upon the back of Christianity. If you were but to go to the graves of those that are gone before you, there you would see their bones scattered, their eyes wasted, their flesh consumed, their mouths corrupted, who perhaps were lofty ones. Where be now their ruddy lips, their lovely cheeks, their fluent tongues, their sparkling eyes ? Are they not all gone and

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and come to nothing? and so will you be ere long; therefore, what cause have you to be proud of these things?

6. If you have got into God's favour, let us be sure to labour to keep his favour whilst we live, and then certainly we shall die in his favour.

Oh! whoever you be that happen to read these few lines, let me beg of you to make religion your main business; hearing, reading, praying, and believing.

Do nothing in this world, but what ye can answer in another: *For we shall all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, &c. 2 Cor. v. 10.* To die well is a long art which thou hast but a short time to learn; they that have long furnished themselves with all spiritual means, find work enough to vanquish and overcome all their spiritual enemies. How then shalt thou, careless soul, if thou wilt not take hold of this opportunity, be in hopes to effect it, when the onset of the enemy shall be strong and prevalent; and then through pains in the body, and perplexities and distractedness of the mind, very weak and nowise able to resist; when impediments shall be multiplied, and helps diminished, thy distraction great, thy inclination little, and leisure none; for at the hour of death, there is so many and great things will cause thee to die, that thou shalt have neither mind nor time nor strength to die well.

Therefore, as thou desirest the everlasting welfare of thy precious and immortal soul, let what has been desired of thee in this small piece, be strictly observed and done without delay, that so you may be everlastingly happy with God and his holy angels in the highest heavens.

F I N I S.



